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DE Directorate establishes new division

by Deb Mercurio, Directed Energy Directorate

KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. — Establishing a Beam Control Division at the Air Force Research Laboratory's Directed Energy Directorate, announced by Air Force officials Thursday, July 24, will combine a division with a branch to focus on beam control efforts.

The work of the new division will focus on compensating for optical disturbances in the atmosphere in regard to imaging and laser propagation.

Headed by Lt. Col. Mark C. Crews, the division will combine the Starfire Optical Range Division with the Airborne Laser Technologies Branch to form the new division of approximately 65 military and civilian personnel.

"Combining beam control expertise and talents into a cohesive group, allows the organization of a technical program synergy for New Mexico optical sites, such as the Starfire Optical Range and North Oscura Peak," Crews said.

Starfire Optical Range and North Oscura Peak are two of the nation's premier optical ranges for atmospheric compensation and control of laser beams. These optical ranges are used for laser weapons development, earth to space laser propagation research, high-resolution satellite imaging, atmospheric turbulence research, and adaptive optics technology development.

Starfire Optical Range is located on a hilltop in the southeastern portion of Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., and its primary mission is to develop optical sensing, imaging and propagation technologies to support Air Force aerospace missions.

North Oscura Peak is a site in the northern portion of the U.S. Army's White Sands Missile Range, N.M., and is designed to assemble and evaluate advanced sensor tracking and atmospheric compensation systems. A main goal is to improve the Air Force's ability to track missiles and then efficiently transmit laser energy through the atmosphere to destroy those missiles.

The mission of the new division is to develop, demonstrate and transition advanced beam control system technologies to provide high-performance, operational capabilities in beam control for laser applications.

Crews received a bachelor's degree from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1982 and a master's degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1987, both in electrical engineering. He received a doctorate in electrical engineering from the University of Oxford, England in 1992. The new division chief is a native of Oklahoma City. @